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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: USING COMIC BOOKS TO COMBAT EXTREMISM

Sensitive but Unclassified -- Not for Internet Distribution

¶1. (U) As part of its expanding efforts to combat Islamic extremism and to educate German Muslim youth about western style democracy, the North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) recently released its second manga style comic book "Andi 2" (http://www.andi.nrw.de/Andi2/andi2_start.htm 1). The comic book storyline is geared towards 12-16 year olds and follows a student and his circle of friends through their encounters with Islamic extremism. Copies of "Andi 2" are currently being sent to every school in NRW. The first comic in this series, "Andi 1" focused on right wing extremism and was tested extensively with focus groups. Over 170,000 copies of "Andi 1" have already been printed and distributed in NRW.

¶2. (U) The OPC official who oversees the comic series told Pol/Econoff that the "Andi 2" project grew out of feedback from "Andi 1." Several schools indicated that right wing extremist ideas were not much of a problem among their teenagers, but that a comic on the theme of Islamic extremism would be more useful. This led to the development of "Andi 2." "Initially, we were nervous about doing this," he said, "especially after the reaction in Europe to the Mohammad caricatures." As a result, the OPC sought input from in-house Muslims and Islam experts as well as from experts of the NRW Ministry of Education and Ministry of Integration.

¶3. (U) To date "Andi 2" has received some criticism. A newspaper affiliated with the Turkish Islamist Milli-Goerues group complained that one of the Muslim characters is "too dark," and that the term "Jihad" is not correctly defined and portrayed. The OPC official admitted that they did not pay close attention to the skin color of the characters, deferring to the artist instead. The OPC has sent copies of "Andi 2" to the four major Muslim umbrella organizations in Germany, but to date only the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD) has reacted, mainly positively but stating that they would have liked to have been consulted in the initial planning stages. The OPC official defended the manner in which the comic books were conceived, maintaining that the OPC had done its due diligence. The OPC and the Ministry of Education are currently creating teacher discussion guides on this subject in response to requests from the schools.

Comment

¶4. (SBU) While no studies have yet been conducted, we have heard anecdotal evidence suggesting that the OPC is on the right track by using the comic book medium to educate youth about politics, civics, and extremism. OPC officials report that

initial feedback on "Andi 1" and "Andi 2" has been positive, with even the leftist "TAZ" daily applauding the OPC's innovative approach. It will likely be difficult to measure their effectiveness, but it is encouraging that other German states have already copied, printed, and disseminated "Andi 1" under their state OPC name. At a total cost of 66,000 euros for both comic projects, this innovative idea is an inexpensive tool in the NRW government's campaign against right wing and Islamic extremism. End Comment.

15. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

BOYSE